DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 319 209 EC 230 899

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TITLE Identifying and Serving the Gifted New Immigrant/Refugee: Problems, Strategies, Implications.
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Council for Exceptional Children (68th, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, April 23-27, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Ability Identification; Cross Cultural Training; Cultural Background; *Cultural Differences; Cultural Influences; *Delivery Systems; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethnic Groups; Family Influence; *Gifted; *Immigrants; Limited English Speaking; Special Programs

ABSTRACT

The problems of accurately identifying and serving giftedness are vastly compounded with children of new immigrant families. Linguistic and cultural complications, economic and attitudinal factors, sociocultural peer-group expectations, cross-cultural stress, intergenerational conflict, and school system conflict frequently deflect efforts to recognize giftedness and talent areas. Strategies are outlined for dealing with each of these specific complicating factors, and include such techniques as explaining the concept of gifted education to immigrant parents in their own language, increasing the home-school interface, encouraging journal writing, placing students according to educational background and not chronological age, and ensuring that screening and selection committees have sufficient cultural knowledge. Includes 34 references. (JDD)

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IDENTIFYING and SERVING THE GIFTED NEW IMMIGRANT/REFUGEE

PROBLEMS, STRATEGIES, IMPLICATIONS

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For: ERIC
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Paper presented at the Annual Convention
of the Council for Exceptional Children
(68th, Toronto, Canada, April 23-27, 1990)

A043

Proposal for 1990 CEC Convention

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Title of Proposal: Identifying the Gifted New Immigrant/Refugee: Problems, Strategies, Implications

The immigrant student has a profound impact on local areas and on a nation's future. Cultural sensitivity programs merely produce a benign atmosphere and do not of themselves assist the school to maximize each student's potential.

It devolves upon the schools to understand the process of change and to employ that process in the interests of both the student and nation and the larger international picture. Societal change is always to be expected, but in the interest of the society within which that change takes place, provision must be made for, not denied to, those who would infuse it with new life, from the rich perspective of cultural diversity. When the new immigrant population is tapped for talent potential, then both society and the individual benefit.

Problem areas must first be accurately defined in the light of the specific culture and culture conflict. Attention must then be directed to problem-specific techniques to ensure correct placement and appropriately differentiated learning experiences. If immigrants are to be included in the life of their new country, then they must also be included in a vision of education which speaks to the fulfillment of each child's capabilities.

The problems of accurately identifying and servicing giftedness are vastly compounded with children of new immigrant families. Linguistic and cultural complications, economic and attitudinal factors, socio-cultural peer-group expectations, cross-cultural stress, and intergenerational conflict frequently deflect efforts to recognize giftedness and talent areas. In addition, there are difficulties connected with refugee problems, illegal immigration, and the fact that many of the new arrivals are increasingly from groups whose culture and language differ markedly from their resettlement situation.

Presented is an analysis of the problem areas and the underlying causes followed by practical suggestions which address these areas and offer viable application of field-based coping techniques. An exploration of possible outcomes concludes with a discussion of the societal and educational implications of the identification of giftedness in the new immigrant populations.

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Problems of identifying and servicing giftedness are compounded with children of new immigrant families. Presented is an analysis of the problem areas and underlying causes. Practical suggestions offering viable application of field-based techniques conclude with implications and possible outcomes.

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A043

The Broken English Dream

by Pedro Petri

To the United States we came.
To learn how to misspell our name.
To lose the definition of pride.
To have misfortune on our side.
To live where rats and roaches roam.
In a house that is definitely not a home.
To be trained to turn on television sets.
To dream about jobs you'll never get.
To fill out welfare applications.
To graduate from school without an education.

From New Voices: Immigrant Students in U. S. Public Schools,

from a report by National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1987, Boston, MA p.65.

While we talk about democracy and equal opportunity, in reality many of our students are barely given a chance to get out of the gate. We resist meeting immigrant children even half way. the basic question is not how can we teach these students, but whether we really want to.

Rosario Anaya
School board Member
San Francisco Unified Schools, CA

(from New Voices: Immigrant Students in U.S. Public Schools, p.39)

Identifying and Serving the Gifted New Immigrant: Problems, Strategies, Implications

The problems of accurately identifying and servicing giftedness are vastly compounded with children of new immigrant families. Linguistic and cultural complications, economic and attitudinal factors, socio-cultural peer-group expectations, cross-cultural stress, and intergenerational conflict frequently deflect efforts to recognize giftedness and talent areas. In addition, there are difficulties connected with refugee problems, illegal immigration, and the fact that many of the new arrivals are increasingly from groups whose culture and language differ markedly from their American resettlement situation.

Presented is an analysis of the problem areas and the underlying causes, followed by practical suggestions which address these areas and offer viable application of field-based coping techniques. An exploration of possible outcomes concludes with a discussion of the societal and educational implications of the identification of giftedness in the new immigrant populations.

I. PROBLEMS

Linguistic

Many of the new immigrant groups have an increased difficulty with English; that is, in comparison with former waves of immigrants from Europe, because the native language has vastly different structures in spoken and written language, in grammatical structure, and in the alphabet. The strangeness of the alphabet provides a huge stumbling block to the acquisition of reading skills, creates an emotional barrier, and increases feelings of isolation. (Sheehy, 1986; Wei, 1983).

At home there is often limited or even no use of English, with home-school interface minimal, thus further limiting language skills.

Limited English students are frequently perceived as "not ready" for gifted education, with the result that few are placed in such programs.

Cultural

Cultural problems are largely concentrated in the area of social customs, with major conflict manifested in customs which seem strange to the perceptor, perceived as insulting, rude or laughable. Among these are voice tone, eye contact and body contact or gesture. Patting a Thai child on the head, for example, is perceived as insulting to the Thai but when given by the American, the gesture is one of affection. Sex-role problems

also emerge here, with sex-role response a strong factor in creating barriers to adaptation and acceptance of different cultural mores. (Sheehy, 1986; Goffin, 1988). The area of sports is particularly susceptible to sex-role conflict.

There are cultural differences in listening behavior (Trueba, 1983) which may be negatively perceived by the teacher and in response behavior (Harris, 1988; Cohen, 1988), like lowering of the eyes when addressed or passive, seemingly unresponsive staring.

Economic

Many new immigrants are below the poverty line, with as much as 80% coming from Third World countries. Some support multiple households, both here and in the land of origin (National Coalition of Advocates for students, 1988). In addition, the families are large, and older students work after school, with the result that some perform poorly. This is all too often reflected in poor grades which further exclude them from gifted programs.

A hidden factor in this area is poor health, with limited access to health care through lack of knowledge or lack of accessibility. The latter is frequently the result of illegal status, a problem which sometimes results in neglect of basic prevention, including immunization procedures. (Clark, 1988, October). Added to this are physical problems, such as poor vision, hearing loss, and psychological problems, some caused by

torture such as the Cambodian children now living in Massachusetts (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988). According to the report by National Coalition of Advocates for Students (1988), there is an awareness of the problem by authorities, but no data is available.

Attitudinal

The reasons for immigration play an important part in the attitude. An immigrant who comes to the U.S. for economic betterment, or as a result of leaving an untenable political situation has a vastly different attitude from one who is a refugee, and comes to escape from danger. The attitude is a reflection of the originating status, yet all immigrants have an area of social murkiness in that they do not know what to expect or the expectations of others, a murkiness which deepens according to fear, present or residual (Sheehy, 1986). Many feel they do not truly belong here, and sometimes give testimony to this in interviews with the social worker (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988).

Emotional problems, including symptoms of "depression, impaired memory, panic, severe insomnia, periods of disorientation and confusion, reliving of war experiences, separation anxiety, family conflicts, isolation, and suicide" (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988, p.24), are heightened by guilt over survival when members of the family have

been killed, and by family separations when members remain in the endangered area.

Barrier-type attitudes are also erected by a fear of authority, either residual, or because the child or a near relative is an illegal immigrant (Gratz & Pulley, 1984; Portes, McCleod & Parker, 1978; Vasquez, 1988), thus preventing close relationships with teachers. This mistrust of authority results in a syndrome associated with exhaustion of coping behavior (Clark, 1988).

National Coalition of Advocates for Students (1988) reports a poor self-image among immigrant children as a common attitude, citing the testimony of one who ostensibly "made it" finally, as a paraprofessional:

> Believe me, maintaining a half-decent image of yourself wasn't an easy thing...I feel that I had enough strength of character to withstand the many school personnel who tried to destroy my motivation. but many of my classmates didn't make it.
> National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988, p.51

According to the report, frustration often turns to self-hatred and extends to hatred of school and family, constantly aggravated by a feeling of not belonging.

Misinterpretation of actions or misinformation sometimes has tragic results, as in the case of the Vietnamese father who hung himself in the face of being accused of child abuse after treating his sick child with the traditional "cupping" technique practiced in the countryside (Wei, 1983). The technique uses

suction to break a chest cold and often causes welts on the body. Authorities had no cultural knowledge of the technique or of the disgrace of such an accusation and proceeded without appropriate investigation.

Sociocultural and Peer Expectations

A growing problem in this area is racial conflict along with a fear of personal safety associated with the formation of youth gangs. Research (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988) indicates that ethnically, racially and racially aligned gangs can be seen in Lowell, Massachusetts (Cambodians vs Puerto Ricans), Providence, Rhode Island (Hispanics vs Southeast Asians), Boston (Blacks vs. Chinese) and parts of Florida (Haitians vs. Blacks), all of which lead to new forms of self-hatred as internalization of racial prejudice.

There is, additionally, a dividing line between the aspirations of illegal immigrants and other groups, including refugees. (Trueba, 1988; Portes, McLeod, & Parker, 1978), and differing expectations economically, psychologically, and politically.

Cross-Cultural Stress

Vasquez (1988) reports that the sex-role related problems as a factor in cross-cultural stress are exacerbated by "feminization of the classroom" (p.245). Cross-cultural stress

is not a new, but continuing problem, and as long as there are new waves of immigrants, it will be there:

> America is, and always has been, at any point in time, the sum of the tensions between its older and newer immigrants, whether they came from Europe or south of the border or across the Pacific
>
> (McWilliams, 1973, p.viii)

This is not to say that the continuation of the problem should give rise to acceptance, but rather that it is time to seek ways of dealing with it through appropriate preparation.

Intergenerational Conflict

This extends from the placing of responsibility on young children who act as interpreters for their families to a shift in cultural values within generations. In the one case the Americanized children and youth may resent the dependence of the elders, and in the other the younger generation is seen as disassociating itself with the old traditions. This produces a double stress resulting in coping strategies which have a negative effect both on self concept and on family relationships (Harris, 1988).

School System Conflict

One of the most severe problems in identification of this population is misplacement in schools, with the accepted mode placements made according to chronological age rather than level of education. Students may have had little or sporadic

schooling, possibly even no schooling prior to coming to the U.S. This is aggravated by the lack of school records, and nothing on which to base information. Wei (1983) reports the frequency of the wrong date of birth in school records. This is not always the fault of the school, because many children hide facts about years spent in the former school to save face (Center for Educational Research and Innovation, 1987; Vuong, 1988). Poor motivation in school and clashes with school personnel can be put down to low sensitivity of teaching personnel coupled with misconceptions about the originating culture. Goldberg (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988) relates the practice of superficial treatment of the originating culture, "two foods and three old heroes" (p.52) as a source of conflict.

Overcrowded classrooms and schools, combined with opposition from staff to special programs which increased in already overcrowded schools encourage the lockstep use of standardized tests, with norms which preclude entrance to the gifted program. According to testimony by Steinberg and Halsted (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988) immigrant children are frequently tracked into ESL and then encouraged to take vocational courses. Misplacement also occurs when handicapped gifted, culturally different, and immigrants are only classified in terms of handicaps (Poplin & Wright, 1983), a problem not confined to immigrants. Absurdities result in ethnocentric misplacement, giving rise to learning problems, such as placing a rigorously trained Japanese 14 year old in need of Calculus with

a Laotian 14 year old who had but two years of schooling because they were both Asian (Vuong, 1988).

On the other side of the coin may be seen a very high barrier to proper placement erected by the parents of immigrant children who mistrust any kind of special education class, including gifted and talented (Wei, 1980).

Sugai and Maheady (1988) report a disproportionate number of immigrants as referred for psychological services. Research by Trueba (1988) reveals that teachers identify behaviors in terms of adjustment and/or achievement problems. Further, field-dependent learning styles are frequently open to misunderstanding. One area where problems arise is physical expression, such as use of body language by Haitian children, who come from a culture which emphasizes physical contact as a means of communication.

A Widespread Problem

In terms of identification of gifted immigrants on a broad scale, the problem is certainly not confined to the U.S. CERI (1987) asserts that most children of immigrants are disadvantaged in countries of employment and are inappropriately assigned to special education in Western Europe, Canada, and Australia. That this is a fact is cold comfort. In fine, recognition of the problem is but an initial step, and means must be sought for amelioration and solution.

II STRATEGIES

Effective strategies which are directed to the problem areas offer applications for positive action in the world of practice. The following guidelines therefore speak to specific problems as outlined in section I of this article.

Linguistic

1. Limited English proficient students who are perceived as "not ready" for TAG programs should be targeted and given some form of enrichment to sustain them until their language skills show sufficient progress.
2. Institute independent or small group research projects with reference books in the native language. Couple this with a presentation to the immediate group or the class. This gives responsibility and respects the learning style.
3. Cultivate an awareness of code-switching to increase linguistic sensitivity on the part of the staff (Trueba, 1983).
4. Explain the concept of TAG and TAG concepts to immigrant parents in their own language, verbally or via a simple publication like a mimeographed booklet.
5. Provide focus on both the objective ability to speak the new language and the demonstrated desire to learn it (Portes, McLeod, & Parker, 1978).

6. Watch for the higher achiever in his/her native language. Trueba (1983) cites the example of Jose', grade 6, who reads 3-1/2 years above norm in Spanish, shows about 1 year above in math, but is 2 years behind in English reading and language.

Cultural

1. Use the informal approach to allay the fears of the parent and of the child.
2 Conduct parent interviews in the native language using culturally sensitive questioning.

Economic

1. Take into account the aspirations of the immigrant group, with attention to parental status variables such as occupation, education, etc. (Portes, McLeod, & Parker, 1978).
2. Assume nothing about the economic status or economic perceptions of any ethnic group. Work from facts only.

Attitudinal

1. Work to increase home-school interface (Harris, 1988). This frequently results in lowered conflict and higher achievement.

2. Cultivate an awareness that most immigrant groups possess extraordinary courage and resiliency, are optimistic, well-balanced, and have a strong desire to overcome the past and build a new life.
3. Tap the sense of self-reliance by utilizing a biographical approach which concentrates on the positive aspects.
4. Recognize the ego strength, achievement motivation and tolerance of ambiguity. (Portes, McLeord, & Parker, 1978). This would suggest the TTCT (Torrance, 1974) would be suited to immigrants, but not necessarily those with a refugee background.
5. Encourage empowerment through expression, such a publications or journals containing writings like those of MOSAIC, from South Boston High School.
6. Give the message, "you are valued, your culture is valued, and you have much to contribute."
7. Encourage journal writing, which is therapeutic, for example:

> I was intellectually stimulated again -- and I wanted to discuss problems which had been bothering me. But when I came home to our apartment, sitting alone in the midst of drab walls and ugly furniture, I felt like striking at my invisible foe. Then I began to write.
>
> (Bolosan, 1973, p.305)

8. Encourage the writing of stories and poems. It helps them "to get the darkness out", as Lakhana, a teenager from Cambodia:

> ---I'm in the darkness of pain.
> It's hurt, and hurt so much I
> couldn't describe
> Couldn't show, couldn't talk,
> Worse than a handicap who
> uses a crutch but I don't
> have a scar or a mark.
> (Sheehy, 1987, p.335)

Socio-Cultural and Peer-Group Expectation

1. Use of narratives, role-playing and bibliotherapy (Ramirez, 1988) will diffuse conflict in this sensitive area.
2. Identify weakness in locus of control (Vasquez, 1988), ascertain the causes, and provide specific intervention.

Cross-Cultural Stress

1. Increase the motivation for self-identification as gifted, softening the cultural difficulty of self-proclamation by reference to TAG as an opportunity class where students may work harder but will learn more.
2. Use care in selecting staff for identification, with specific attention to the sending cultures and ethnocentric attitudes.
3. Recommend timely use of BET (Bicultural Effectiveness Training) where appropriate using Szapocznik, Santisteban, Kurtenes, Perez-Vidal, & Hervis (1983) as a model. This may ameliorate behavioral problems stemming from cultural

conflict when such is indicated, as placement in TAG may temporarily increase cross-cultural difficulties or intergenerational conflict in some cases.

Intergenerational Conflict

1, Utilize situational problems to identify potential, for instance -- "what would you do if you were a) locked out of the house, or b) had no heat on a cold day ---" etc. This is a real life situation and taps the reservoir of resourcefulness in which many immigrant children possess.

2. Use of fantasy and/or non-verbal expression such as music, dance or drawing which brings the parent or family into the product assessment.

3. Utilize peer-referral both within and outside of the culture as an additional source of identification and IEP.

4. Involve outreach workers, as many parents of immigrant children are illiterate and/or fearful of school authority.

5. Stress independence and self responsibility in an effort to uncover ability and potential.

6. Utilize electronic media, audio and videotape in the native language to accommodate parents who are not literate or cannot speak or understand English. These services are usually available through local agencies which serve specific cultural groups such as Haitian Refugee Center, Metropolitan Indochinese Children and Adolescent Services, et. al.

School System Conflict

1. Place or identify students according to educational background and not simply according to chronological age.
2. Interpret bizarre behavior in the light of the child's experience (Ramirez, 1988) like hiding from noises under tables or behind cabinets, intolerance for or fear reaction to colors, especially red (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988). Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder should not influence identification of potential but should be taken into account within the learning environment.
3. Monitor the progress of immigrant TAG students after placement.
4. Utilize a central theme curriculum rather that scope and sequence and observe behavioral response.
5. Utilize extra-curricular activities for input to identification procedures and encourage incorporation of these activities into the learning goals.
6. Eliminate the medical model and the focus on inadequacies.
7. Utilize problem-solving, hands-on experiments and manipulatives to test ability and potential for flexible thinking.
8. Ensure that the screening and selection committee has cultural knowledge of creative production and/or performance and include representative community members in the committee.

9. Focus on cause and effect teaching and testing (Vasquez 1988).
10. Be on the alert for contradictory behavior or passive behavior which may be masking giftedness (Vasquez, 1988).
11. Avoid stereotyping minority or immigrant children in caste-like groups (Trueba, 1988; Ogbu, 1978).
12. Focus on "zone of proximal development," which

> defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state. This concept permits psychologists to understand the developmental processes that are forming, and that will constitute future accomplishments
> (Trueba, 1988, p.281)

13. Include the activity setting, i.e., the classroom, playground gymnasium (Trueba, 1988) in observations for identification and for refinement of curricula.
14. Avoid the superimposition of past identification procedures.
15. Assess from the perspective of field dependent and individual learning styles, such as that used by Ramirez & Casteneda (1974).
16. Place the child in a minimal stress, "culturally congruent" (Trueba, 1983, p.412) environment and observe for a period of time.
17. Utilize computers, which are non-threatening, and observe progress and concentration span.

18. Identify within an instructional context (Sugai & Maheady, 1988), according to the quality and quantity of instruction received.
19. Assess the teacher attitudes periodically.
20. Utilize the developmental (Reyes, 1988) rather than a crisis-oriented model, or a view that the students are coming with liabilities.
21. Utilize curriculum-based assessment which provides diagnostic information and allows teachers to accommodate instruction with the regular classroom. (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988)
22. Follow the seven part Framework for Meeting the Educational Needs of the Immigrant Student as outlined on pages 153-153 of New Voices (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988).

III IMPLICATIONS

The immigrant student has a profound impact on local areas and on the nation's future. Cultural sensitivity programs merely produce a benign atmosphere and do not of themselves assist the school to maximize each student's potential. While SES remains a strong factor, assumptions about such groups lower expectations and are prejudicial to the educative process.

It devolves upon the public schools to understand the process of change and to employ that process in the interests of both the student and the nation. It is perhaps appropriate to

examine Menlo (1987) in the light of change in the student, in the family, in the school and in the larger national and international picture, with concentration on the problems of identifying and serving the gifted new immigrant:

> "My notion has been that all living systems have an inherent drive for change -- and activeness, curiosity and a search for betterment -- and that daily life is comprised of a multitude of receptive responses to requests for action and change initiated by self and others.
>
> (Menlo, A. 1987, pp 29-30)

Societal change is always to be expected, but in the interest of the society within which that change takes place, provision must be made for, not denied to, those who would infuse it with new life, from the rich perspective of cultural diversity.

Conclusion

When the new immigrant population is tapped for talent potential, then both society and the individual benefit. Problem areas must first be accurately defined in the light of the specific culture and culture conflict. Attention must then be directed to problem-specific techniques to ensure correct placement and appropriately differentiated learning experiences.

If immigrants are to be included in the life of their new country, then they must also be included in a vision of education which speaks to the fulfillment of each child's capabilities. As

Iaian Chrichton Smith (1976) says so eloquently in his poem, "Two Girls Singing"

It neither was the words nor yet the tune,
Any tune would have done and any words.
Any listener or no listener at all.

As nightingales in rocks or a child crooning
in its own world of strange awakening
or larks for no reason but themselves.

So on the bus through late November running
by yellow lights tormented, darkness falling,
the two girls sang for miles and miles together

and it wasn't the words or tune. It was the singing.
It was the human sweetness in that yellow,
the unpredicted voices of our kind.

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